

HENRY MILLER, IN CATALAN

In the show window of La Catalonia, I saw a book by Henry Miller, an old title of the 1940's, Rimbaud or the Times of the Assassins, translated into catalan and published by Ayma, S.A. I bought it and have been turning its leaves with thoroughness.

El temps dels assassins has been published in May. It is, if I am not wrong, the fourth book by Miller translated into catalan. The other previous titles are: Un diable al paradís (1966, translated by Pedroló, Edicions 62), Primavera negra (1970, t. by Jordi Arbones, Ayma) and El somriure al peu de l'escala (1970, t. by Joan Oliver, Ayma). The translation of this fourth book by Miller is signed by Arbones, the same translator of Black Spring, the most "important" of the four books translated into Catalan.

I remember that right after the publication of Primavera negra, it was very commented the excellent translation by Jordi Arbones; well, in saying "it was very commented", I mean that the handful of readers who knew —and knew very well— Miller and had read Black Spring in two or three languages, were amazed when they saw how well sounded Miller en Catalan. The translator of Rimbaud and the Times of the Assassins confirms that first and pleasant impression. And what is more: it lets us see which is the concept Arbones has formed about Miller; it lets us see which is the attitude of the translator in front of the Miller's text, a detail important to me, because it has confirmed what I supposed in reading the translation of Black Spring, i.e.; that Arbones is a "fan" of Miller.

Arbones has written an introduction to El temps dels assassins and not only has given us a correct biographic and bibliographic vision about the American writer but he has tried both to define and to explain Miller's work and ~~what~~ he applies to a critic: Karl Shapiro "maybe the man who has defined more accurately the literary quality of his work". What did Shapiro say? He said, simply; Miller was not a writer as Henry James can be; maybe he is a prophet, but, anyway, Shapiro thinks Miller is "the greatest of all living authors". An author but not a writer and, at last, a poet: "I do not call him a poet because he has never written a poem; he even dislikes poetry (a lie!). But everything he has written is a poem in the best as well as in the broadest sense of the word."

Arbones goes yonder than Shapiro in his "irrational" admiration for Miller: "What is, then, Henry Miller in conclusion? Is he a "writer" or an "author", a poet or a prophet, a genius or a mad man, a sado-masochist, a devil or an angel, a "patagonian" or an anarquist? Maybe he is each one of these things, but manly, if we dare to define him with only one word this indefinable artist, maybe we should say Miller is a 'Man'". To say this, my dear Arbones, is to say a lot of things and it is to say nothing...

Miller's Rimbaud, published by "New Directions" in two parts, in the 1940's, could not be anything but an image of Miller himself through Rimbaud. More than a reading of Rimbaud, this book offers us a reading of Miller, of a Miller related to Rimbaud. It is just as when Vargas Llosa talks about Madame Bovary, but with a small difference: Miller, as well as Rimbaud, passed a season in Hell. It is, then, a book one hundred per cent millerian, introduced and translated by a man who is an unconditional fan of Miller. It is a book made with passion, which it is the way of approaching Miller, and it comes to enrich a Catalan bibliography very poor yet of the Tropics author, a bibliography that should be oriented to fundamental titles as Remember to Remember or the correspondence with Durrell or The Books in my Life.

J. de S.